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**The University of Texas at Austin
Social and emotional learning through creative classrooms**

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Social and emotional learning through creative classrooms

by

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Dedication

For all my future students. I hope that I can not only give you a great experience with art, but that you discover something about yourself and learn to care more deeply for others in my classroom.

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Abstract

Social and emotional learning through creative classrooms

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This study investigates the teaching experience of one elementary school visual art teacher during her time at Austin Best School (ABS) in Austin, TX. Through a narrative interview, this case-study examines how social and emotional learning (SEL) is incorporated in one art classroom and the educator's perspectives concerning this approach. Through this investigation, a close look was taken at the ways an art educator can promote social and emotional learning both informally through interaction with peers and teachers, as well as formally through curriculum. Art education in school settings engages students in a different way than a traditional classroom, and therefore allows for more open communication and expression. Art education has the potential to give these students an outlet by which to respond to their emotions, to others, and to their environment in a way that feels safe and accessible at all age levels. There is a need for more specific research into how art educators are incorporating social and emotional learning in ways that are directly benefiting students' development. This project helps to demonstrate how art educators can assist in the development of competencies that allow their students to better relate to others and the world in which they live.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As social and emotional learning (SEL) becomes more readily adopted in schools, we are seeing enormous benefits in promoting social engagement and emotional intelligence among students. There are ample studies showing the benefits of SEL, such as one by neuroscientist Richard Davidson which discusses the neuroscience of social, emotional, and academic learning (Edutopia, 2007). However, there is very little research on the topic of SEL and art learning. This thesis will bridge the gap in available research on social and emotional learning in the art classroom. A narrative interview was conducted with an art teacher at the Austin Best School (ABS)¹ in Austin, TX. This study investigated how SEL is incorporated in one art classroom at ABS and the educator's perspectives concerning this approach. The Austin Best School has already adopted social and emotional learning in all of their classrooms through "conscious discipline, positive behavior systems/interventions, and restorative practices" (Austin Best School, 2018). Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) is a framework employed by the school to assist educators in adopting and organizing behavioral interventions in their classroom practices. The ABS website notes that "conscious discipline helps to create a school family with routines, meaningful classroom jobs, a safe place, and specific strategies for reducing stress and working out peer conflicts" (ABS, 2018). This research included an interview regarding the social and emotional learning initiatives that ABS has

¹ As is common in qualitative studies, a pseudonym has been used to protect the privacy of individuals and organizations who have not given their consent for participation in this study.

put in place, as well as a review of a selection SEL curriculum from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). CASEL is the leader in SEL integration into academic practice in the United States and they provide some excellent resources for schools and educators. The SEL implementation at Austin Best School is based on teaching skills to help students cope with their emotions or social conflicts. SEL programs teach children that they are not only responsible for themselves but also for the community in which they belong. Likewise, conscious discipline requires that both the educators and the students are responsible for their behaviors. Educators employing an SEL approach are striving to not only pass along academic knowledge, but to encourage students' healthy social and emotional development in their students. By reviewing existing literature and SEL curriculum, conducting a narrative interview with an art educator, and identifying best practices, this research suggested that the art classroom is an ideal environment for social and emotional learning.

CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION

In what ways can an art educator promote social and emotional learning both informally through interaction with peers and teachers, as well as formally through curriculum?

PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is an enormous influence today on the academic performance of students and particularly on how their learning can be evaluated through testing. This began with

the implementation of evaluation testing in public schools during the 1960s and continues to be a primary measure of academic success in schools today. (Herman & Golan, 1993)

However, what educators are failing to evaluate is the psychological, emotional, and social development of children and how these fundamental skills are, or are not, being reinforced in the classroom. School violence is increasing in our classrooms, and the underlying causes contributing to those events are failing to be addressed by policymakers. The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child has stated that emotional wellbeing and social competence present during early childhood development provide a strong foundation for brain development and cognitive abilities (National Scientific Counsel on the Developing Child, 2007). Social and emotional intelligence, learned in childhood and adolescence, affect how individuals function as adults in the workplace and in relationships (Brenner, Chen, and Mindness, 2008). Competencies taught through social and emotional learning have shown a positive effect on students' overall learning, represented by a rise in test scores and overall intellectual development (Davidson, 2010). Art education in school settings engages students in a different way than a traditional classroom, and therefore allows for more open communication and expression. Emotions, in particular, are sometimes more easily expressed through creative means. Therefore, art education has the potential to give these students an outlet by which to respond to their emotions, to others, and to their environment in a way that feels safe and accessible at all age levels. There is a need for more specific research into how art educators are incorporating social and emotional learning in ways that are directly benefiting students' development. This project helps to demonstrate how art

educators can assist in the development of competencies that allow their students to better relate to others and the world in which they live.

MOTIVATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Personal Motivations

My interest in the subject of social and emotional learning through art is, quite honestly, a simple one. As a preservice teacher, I believe that the most important gifts I can give my students are the tools they need to develop into emotionally intelligent and socially competent adults. Yes, it is important to teach students academic principles, and I believe that teaching curriculum which gives them a love for the arts is essential.

However, I believe that art lends itself to emotional and character development well. I have gathered a sound foundation of studies on the benefits of incorporating social and emotional learning in classroom interactions and curriculum, but through my interview I also gathered wisdom and practical methods of incorporating SEL into interactions with students in my own classroom. I care deeply about communicating respect to those with whom I interact, empathizing with others, seeking to meet their needs to the best of my ability, and about contributing something meaningful to society. I don't believe that we are all innately born with the desire for these things, they are skills which have been taught to me by my family, friends, and my teachers. The art classroom is a special environment in which to invest in children on a more individual basis and teach things beyond the state-mandated curriculum. Art learning has enabled me in many ways to process through emotions and express theme through my work. Additionally, I have

gained skills related to social awareness competencies through viewing and understanding the artistic work of others. In this study I sought to explain the benefits of SEL, revealing simple tools a real teacher has already implemented. I challenge art educators to help their students become the best artists and human beings that they can be.

Professional Motivations

Public schools are seeing a significant rise in incidents such as bullying and shootings. These serious issues leave us asking if there is something that could have been done earlier to prevent these kinds of disturbing interpersonal conflicts among youths. One of the most basic preventative measures to avoid violence is to equip our children with social and emotional skills to help them better relate to the world around them. Karakou and Glasman (2004) noted that successful education is defined by the ability to provide students with skills and knowledge of specific subjects, as well as providing experiences that are fulfilling in non-academic areas. This is the foundation for learner-centered education which was advocated by art educators such as Victor Lowenfeld and Kenneth Beittel in the early to mid-twentieth century. However, with the advent and subsequent popularization of a more subject-focused Discipline Based Art Education in the last century, educators focused on learning, and de-emphasized the role of the student in curriculum. This is not to say that classroom teachers should implement a blending of art education and art therapy, only that they should consider an emotional and social emphasis alongside artistic skill practice and foundational knowledge. In the field of art

education today, there is either an emphasis on social justice through art or an emphasis on academic outcomes driven by a desire to meet testing standards. In 1999, the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) reported on the need for the development of creative and cultural curriculum in classrooms. The NACCCE (1999) found that, “every child has capabilities beyond the traditionally academic ... children who struggle with academic success can have outstanding abilities in other areas ... creative and cultural education of the sort we propose can also help to raise academic standards. The key is to find what children are good at. Self-confidence and self-esteem then tend to rise and overall performance to improve.” (p. 13). The NACCCE was primarily concerned with how arts could improve a child’s overall academic performance. However, they brought to light some excellent points about the ability of art education to inform all areas of a student’s life. This can be more specifically applied to the areas of social and emotional learning, which equip children with the necessary social and emotional competencies to navigate life in caring and compassionate ways. SEL can be taught across all ages and through a variety of subjects, but I think that art lends itself particularly well to the development and expression of emotions. Emotions can often be hard for a child to work through verbally, and it can be easier for them to communicate and deal with feelings through creative outlets. The purpose for this study was to take a closer look at how one elementary art teacher used curriculum and classroom interactions to teach their students social and emotional skills. By examining what is already being done, we can see what is effective and what can be improved upon in SEL instruction. Research of this type helps highlight the non-

academic benefits of art education and outlines some practical ways in which art educators can implement the findings in their classrooms.

RESEARCH METHODS

Location of Study

I conducted my study with a former art educator at Austin Best School² in Austin, TX. Austin Best School is a public charter elementary school dedicated to “fostering compassion, collaboration, and critical thinking through engaging in the natural world” (ABS, 2018). I chose this school because of the diversity among its students and because the school was already implementing SEL in all of its classrooms. Austin Best School “supports the whole child using research based social emotional practices” to develop “socially and emotionally aware, confident, critical-thinkers and problem-solvers through interactive, hands-on lessons and relevant project-based learning” (ABS, 2018). I also wanted a district where a portion of the students were participating in a free or reduced lunch program. According to statistics from The Texas Tribune 34.5% of students at ABS were considered “at risk” and 11.7% of their students are eligible for free or reduced lunches. I believe that these students can receive the most benefit from the implementation of SEL in the art classroom. The art classroom is the perfect environment for SEL skills to be taught, because it provides an environment for creative free-thinking and ample social interaction. Art classrooms also create a more level playing field for students who may struggle with traditional academics.

² Austin Best School is a pseudonym.

Participants

For this study, I conducted an interview with one former elementary art teacher from the Austin Best School. I chose to interview just one individual in order to limit the scope of my study, as each teacher's experience will vary based on the ways the teacher chooses to implement SEL in their classroom. This adult educator was able to articulate concrete methods of SEL implementation in their school and district, as well as perceived observations of improvement among students as a result. I chose to exclude interviews directly with students from this study because it would be difficult for my chosen age group to verbally identify development within themselves. It is often difficult for young children to be self-aware enough to measure their own social skills and emotional capacity. However, I was able to gather the necessary information from the teacher's daily observation of their students as well as their observation of any changes in school culture or a reduction in disciplinary issues.

Data Collection Tools

I interviewed one teacher at the Austin Best School in a semi-structured style, the foundation of which was a set of interview questions that assisted me in gathering personal experiences from her. This interview and analysis process served to supplement the psychological, developmental, and educational research I have and will continue to gather concerning the subject of social and emotional development and learning. I conducted the interview using a set of pre-written questions designed to discover the areas where social and emotional learning is directly incorporated into classroom art

curriculum, and ways in which SEL is incorporated informally through instructor-student interactions as well as student-peer interactions. I also attempted to discover if she perceived the most success with a formal or informal approach to SEL. I recorded my subject with her permission during the interview and subsequently transcribed and coded my interview to interpret the information gathered. Following the interview, I compared what she had shared with me with the research I had gathered regarding the measurable benefits of SEL in a school setting. My goal was to compare any unique ways that SEL was able to be implemented in an elementary art classroom with SEL implementation in a standard classroom. The interview process lent a practical nature to existing research and curriculum, so that other art educators and administrators are able to model what my interview subject has found most successful in their own classroom.

Definition of Terms

Competency: A set of defined behaviors that provide a structured guide enabling identification, evaluation, and development of the behaviors in individuals.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL): The process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.^{[1][2]}

Relationship Skills: The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly,

listen well, cooperate with, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and see and offer help when needed.

Responsible Decision-Making: The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the wellbeing of oneself and others.

Self-Awareness: The ability to accurately recognize one's own thoughts and values and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a "growth mindset."

Self-Management: The ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations—effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.

Social Awareness: The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

I chose to organize this study into five chapters. Chapter One is the introduction to my study, where I have outlined research methods and motivations. Chapter Two is a review of literature, which I have broken down into three sections: SEL research, SEL in

education, and SEL in art learning. This chapter provides the backbone for my own research and supports the ideas I have presented. It also explains why this study is an important addition to the field of art education. Chapter Three contains a more thorough discussion of the methodology utilized when conducting my research, including data collection and analysis. Chapter Four contains my data analysis of the information I gathered from my interview, which will be paired alongside a review of CASEL curriculum. Finally, Chapter Five is a conclusion for my study summarizing all the information I have presented and situating my study among others.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The background research for this study focuses on three major areas and one subsection: (a) foundations of social intelligence and emotional development, which offers an introduction to the origins of how cognition and awareness develop; (b) the integration of social and emotional learning in educational settings; and (c) social and emotional learning integrated with art education. This chapter explores pertinent literature related to these three areas and how they inform formal curriculum and classroom interaction.

SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Social intelligence is the ability to understand and manage one's own behavior for the benefit of success in social interactions and relationships. The study of social intelligence began more than 100 years ago with the work of American psychologist and adult learning researcher Edward Thorndike. He described social intelligence as, "the ability to act wisely in human relations" (Essex, 2017). This is a simple but effective explanation of both the study of and the benefits of social intelligence. Thorndike is most well-known for his research regarding the Law of Effect, a principle of behavioral conditioning which states that "responses that produce a satisfying effect in a particular situation become more likely to occur again in similar situations, and responses that produce a discomforting effect become less likely to occur again in similar situations" (Essex, 2017). This is essentially saying that our social intelligence is formed by the interactions we have with other human beings. The reactions we are met with in response

to behaviors help to form neural pathways in our brain. These pathways tell a developing child what behaviors and responses are appropriate.

Emotional development also plays a key role in social adaptation. If a child does not exhibit emotional control and understanding of those emotions, when they encounter negative feedback from others in social situations, they don't have the ability to understand why their response was inappropriate. This is why a combination of healthy emotional development and social intelligence are essential for overall neurological development in children. There is an abundance of literature, primarily published by psychologists, regarding emotional development and social intelligence. It is important to consider these foundational concepts before delving into the impact of social and emotional development on learning.

These studies give a helpful summary of early childhood social cognitive development. For example, self-regulation has been found to be an important control mechanism for thought, action, and emotion. Individual differences in self-regulation due to natural cognitive elopement, as well as outside influences in childhood, have been found to predict an important developmental outcome in academic areas. It has also been found that self-regulation affects a person's physical health, the likelihood of substance dependence, socioeconomic status, and the likelihood of a criminal conviction in adulthood. (Zelazo and Lyons, 2012) With proper emotional and social cognitive elopement, children are increasingly able to reflect on and learn from their experiences. This facilitates cognitive flexibility, i.e., the ability to adapt and change perspectives, working memory, inhibitory control, emotional reappraisal, and empathetic concern for

others (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Since the focus of this study was the ability art education has to encourage SEL developments through learning, the theory of social and emotional development serves as a sound scientific base for further expansion.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)

In contrast to the rather established fields of psychological study examining social and emotional development, the study of these fields related to academic performance is quite young. When Plato discussed educational ideals in *The Republic*, he proposed that “by maintaining a sound system of education and upbringing, you produce citizens of good character” (Plato, Emlyn-Jones, C. J., & Preddy, 2013). Although Plato’s writing was first published c. 380 BC, it wouldn’t be until the late 1980s that researchers began formally studying the ties between emotional and social development to education. In a 1988 article published in *Scientific American*, James Comer speculated that “the contrast between a child’s experiences at home and those in school deeply affects the child’s psychological development and that this in turn shapes academic achievement” (Comer, 1988). In 1994, the term social emotional learning first reached the ears of the general public, the Collaborative to Advance Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was founded. CASEL defines social-emotional learning as:

The process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (CASEL, 2014a)

CASEL is currently headquartered in Chicago and remains a leader in advocating for the integration of social and emotional learning in school systems nationwide. The programming advocated by CASEL is supported by ongoing research and makes its way into classroom practice as well as school policies. Their intention is to fully integrate SEL as a part of education for students in preschool through high school. CASEL has identified five areas of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Expanding on these core competencies, CASEL (2014) defines them as:

(1) Self-awareness: The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism; (2) Self-management: The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals; (3) Social-awareness: The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports; (4) Relationship skills: The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed; (5) Responsible decision-making: The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, and realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being self and others. (CASEL, 2014b)

These five primary SEL competencies defined by CASEL start to develop in early childhood but begin to exhibit themselves more clearly as a child reaches school age as the child interacts with more adults and peers.



Figure 1: Core SEL Competencies (Image source: CASEL, 2017).

CASEL would go on to coauthor and publish *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators* in 1997. This text established and defined the field and continues to play a key role today. These publications encouraged the subsequent publication of other studies concerning SEL and education in years to follow. Johnathan Cohen argued that the goals education must shift from a focus on testing and evaluation to one that prioritizes academic learning which encourages social, emotional, and ethical competencies. (Cohen, 2006) He provided a comprehensive summary of current studies in social and emotional education, character development through learning, and school-based mental health in the United States. His findings from these various focuses suggest

that social and emotional skills, knowledge, and dispositions provide the foundation for some of the benefits in adult life described in the summery of the Zelazo and Lyons article above. Cohen discusses not only practical principles of learning but also policy changes which would create safe and caring school climates. This article was particularly relevant in light of the rapidly increasing incidence of school shootings in recent years. National attention began with the Columbine shooting on April 20, 1999 in which two students fired upon staff and classmates killing fifteen and injuring countless more. In total, the Washington Post found an average of 10 school shootings per year since Columbine. In 2018, there have been 11 shootings, making the past year the worst on record. (Washington Post, 2018) Some of Cohen's findings in relation to policy changes could have an enormous preventative effect on school violence incidents such as these, as well as bullying. Cohen also emphasized the importance of partnerships between researchers and practitioners (educators) to study and evaluate the effectiveness of social and emotional learning in real-life classrooms.



Figure 2: Core SEL Competencies Expanded (CASEL, 2017).

There is an abundance of research regarding the effectiveness and benefits of incorporating social and emotional learning in educational settings. One such study regarding the impact of SEL on learning has shown that students who are found lacking in multiple areas of SEL competencies, such as self-awareness, self-management, or relationship skills, feel less connected with peers and teachers. This lack of connectivity negatively affects their behavior, mental and physical health, and academic performance. (Durlak, Weissberg, Demnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). In contrast, a study published by the School of Education in collaboration with the Human Development and Psychology program at Harvard University found that social and emotional competencies are key factors for educational success. Students are not the only ones receiving benefit from SEL implementation; we are also seeing an improvement in teacher performance and retention and in overall school culture among those educators implementing SEL (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013). This is likely because SEL practices have the greatest success in schools which adopt implementation from the top down, reaching into every aspect of education. The keys to school-wide success with SEL practices are a major finding of this study and will be outlined in more detail in Chapter 4.

One of the foundational texts used to promote social and emotional learning in classroom management and practices is *Teaching with Love and Logic*. (Fay & Funk, 1995). Although this text doesn't contain any specific SEL curriculum, its enduring popularity represents a significant shift in behaviorist education. The premise behind 'teaching with love and logic' is that, instead of having a discipline system based on rewards and punishments, discipline is based on principles such as respect, honesty,

empathy, etc. (Fay & Funk, 1995). This means that each disciplinary incidence is treated uniquely and each child is addressed individually. This is key because each child sits in a different stage of cognitive development than their peers. This method is an excellent way to communicate and model empathy to students by meeting each child where they are developmentally. It also means that it is the responsibility of each child to resolve their own problems and take responsibility for their actions.

Austin Best School takes a similar classroom management approach to behavioral correction through “conscious discipline, positive behavior systems, and restorative practices” (ABS, 2018). The SEL program at ABS as a whole is focused on teaching competencies such as self-management before challenging behavior arises. This preventative approach presents behavioral problems as an opportunity to teach. *Teaching with Love and Logic* lends a practical element to the ways that social and emotional learning can be taught through informal interactions with instructors and peers. In that way, SEL can be implemented in schools separately from SEL specific curriculum. SEL curriculum is still a rather new element in standardized school environments, but many teachers are beginning the shift by incorporating mindfulness practices in their classrooms.

In contrast to the practice-based approach of Fay and Funk, Schonert-Reichl and Lawlor published an article in 2010 which summarizes a study evaluating the effectiveness of the Mindfulness Education program. Mindfulness education shares many of the same goals with SEL but focuses on self-practice among students and instructors to affect behavior. This program is a preventative education-based intervention that

facilitates the development of social and emotional intelligence and encourages positive emotions. The Mindfulness Education program engages students in what they term “mindful attention training” three times a day with students in grades four to seven. The study was a comparison drawn between six classrooms which were participating in the Mindfulness Education (ME) program with six control classrooms, which were taught using standard curriculum. The teachers of all twelve classrooms rated their students on classroom social and emotional competence. The findings of the study, summarized in the article, were that the students in ME classrooms showed marked improvement in emotional wellbeing. Particularly, students demonstrated a rise in optimism was shown, as well as socially competence behaviors. The study also showed more marked responses from the younger students than the students in the older grades. (Schoner-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010) This emphasizes the importance of implementing such programs at an early age when children’s cognitive development is at its foundational stage. The concept of mindfulness in the classroom a natural idea to integrate with art and was encouraged by the concrete findings in this study.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN AN ART CLASSROOM

The Schoner-Reichl and Lawlor study provides evidence that SEL practices are beneficial when incorporated school-wide at an early age. However, it is prudent to be thoughtful about the ways in which it is incorporated in order to have the greatest effect on child development. The art classroom is a natural fit for this type of learning that requires open communication, expression, and direct feedback. Wallin and Durr (2002)

conducted a study through the Camden County School System in Georgia which implemented an interactive program titled, Teaching Anger Control Through Teamwork (ACTT). The focus of the program was the use of creativity and visual arts as support techniques to classroom instruction. Although this study was clearly geared towards incorporating the arts into standard classroom curriculum, it offered some valuable insights about the power of art and social learning. This program was created by Dr. Ken Wallin, a psychologist and practicing artist, and Dr. Marge Durr, a second great teacher, to offer an educational tool for anger control and character development. The short study summary offers that when walking into a classroom that is practicing ACTT, one may observe: students writing short stories about anger and self-control, drawing and artwork about anger control and the positive results of responsible behavior, music and poetry about people getting along and avoiding problem behavior, peer feedback about character education and problem solving, and students playing games and storytelling about safe environments and academic/social success (Wallin & Durr, 2002). These all sound like excellent practices for teaching social and emotional learning in creative ways. Dr. Daniel Goleman (1997) suggests that a child's "emotional IQ", a measure of their emotional intelligence, has a profound effect on learning in the classroom. The opposite is true as well, learning can have a profound effect on the emotional wellbeing and emotional competency of children. Although brief, the study lays out clear objectives and several outcomes (specifically anger management) observed during the implementation of ACTT.

Instead of taking a view of SEL through a creative lens, Karkou and Glasman (2004) focus mainly on the place of arts within the field of education and the contributions that can be made outside basic knowledge, skills, and appreciation for art. This article argues that the arts not only provide development in the aesthetic and creative, but can affect the moral, psychological, and social functioning of developing minds. They discuss the related field of art therapy, which they consider to be separate from art education, but useful in examining the social and emotional benefits of art and art education. They highlight that the value of art therapy over other interventionist attributed to the ways in which art allows for non-verbal communication. Art therapy suggests that art can be used to facilitate personal development and social integration in school-aged children and adolescents. This article is heavy with sources such as arts and education policies, as well as developmental studies, which will assist in establishing the validity of this study.

In a study by Lauren Leving (2011), she investigated the benefits of “artist created immersive exhibits” housed in contemporary art museums and the ways that they were able to foster social and emotional learning. Her focus is slightly broader than the group studied by Karkou and Glasman, but this source was particularly interesting because it is a thesis written by a graduate student who was interested in a similar study to this one. She specifically studied multi-sensory art exhibits, which engage at least one sense in addition to sight. This thesis offered many of the same benefits in a museum setting that I am seeking to study from classroom incorporation of SEL. Classroom/museum partnerships are often dynamic in the ways that they facilitate artistic learning differently

from one another. Leving studied four different exhibits, two at MoCA, one at Phillips Collection, and one for Hyde Park Art Canter. In addition to her scholarly research on social and emotion learning through art, she also conducted visitor surveys at each of the sites and spoke to museum staff and artists regarding her study. (Leving, 2017) This study focused on offering museum visitors a more meaningful experience with art museums, rather than facilitating long-term social or emotional development in the participants. However, many of the academic sources applied to Leving's thesis study can be applied to SEL application in a school setting. Her conclusion was essentially that multi-sensory exhibitions have a special ability to successfully arouse emotions. She found that these kinds of installations can be a resource to develop socially conscious visitors as a method of propelling social change. Her findings were successfully outlined, but her interview questions had included some elements with which to evaluate empathy or social awareness. Although museum/classroom partnerships offer another facet to SEL education, a study of SEL curriculum implementation in an art classroom will produce more significant and long-term developmental results.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter provides an outline of the selection of my research methodology and why it was best suited for this particular study. I chose to use narrative inquiry as a means of data collection within the framework of case study methodology. I will describe why I felt that both of these approaches were necessary to gather my data and how they fit together. This chapter provides an explanation of both methods as well as a description of my location and participant. I also address how my data was collected and analyzed, concluding with the validity of my findings.

SELECTION OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

When I began my research for this study, I had an essential question that I wanted to answer concerning the ways an art educator could promote social and emotional learning (SEL) in a creative environment. Because I intended the findings of this study to have a practical nature for art educators, I knew I wanted a more narrative direction for the collection and presentation of the data. I also knew that due to the scale of a thesis study it would be the most effective use of my time to conduct a qualitative study rather than something more quantitative. There is a plethora of research available concerning the development of emotional intelligence and social competency in children. Social and emotional development in children has measurable effects on both their academic performance as well as their success in adult life, as outlined in chapter two of this study. These quantitative statistics certainly show the importance of integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) in school beginning at an early age. Although useful in

establishing the validity of SEL, existing research is not directly tied to art education nor to practical application in real classrooms. It is my hope that this study can begin to make these natural connections between SEL and art education and can be a resource for teachers looking to implement specific strategies into their own classrooms. Establishing a research methodology which fit these specific goals took me on a deep dive through common practices in qualitative educational research until I landed on case study as the most natural fit.

Case study methodology seemed to be a natural choice to gather practical research and I found it to be a common method used in educational research. Once I landed on a methodology, I wanted to find an elementary school in Austin which was already incorporating SEL schoolwide. My thesis advisor and department head offered to put me in touch with a former graduate of the art education graduate program at UT who was teaching elementary art at Austin Best School. I was pleased to discover that the school had wholly adopted SEL in all levels, ranging from classroom interactions all the way to administration. At the start of my study, I intended to reach out to the former graduate Amelia Fleming, one administrator, and a parent of one of the children in Amelia's class that year. I hoped that this group of three participants would give me a more comprehensive idea of how SEL affected the school culture, the classroom and art learning, and the students themselves. However, as I began my preliminary research to prepare for each of these interviews, I realized that the scale of conducting a case study with these three individuals was simply too large for a graduate level thesis study. Because case studies are inherently narrow in scope and not conducive to generalization,

I didn't feel as if I was giving up anything valuable in my decision to narrow my scope to a single case study focusing on Amelia.

As I began developing an interview protocol, I found that case study research was a fairly broad term that encompasses a wide variety of data collection methods. The term "case study" seems to refer more to the scope and methodological characteristics of the study than the process of data collection itself. The focus of case study is on what is being studied rather than how it is studied, and I needed a more specific strategy for data collection. The search for greater specificity while maintaining a qualitative focus lead me to narrative inquiry as a basis for my interview. Where case study is broad and can encompass many data collection methods, narrative inquiry focuses on the collection of information through experiences and stories. I felt that narrative inquiry would produce the richest and most applicable data within the framework of case study methodology. In the following sections I will give an overview of the benefits of each method and how they fit together in this study to provide the reader with tangible and useful information they can use in their own art education practices.

CASE STUDY

Over the past forty years, case study research has changed its methodology to reflect a more pragmatic direction in qualitative research. It is a method which continues to change based on a researcher's preferences, perspectives, and intention for their study. These researchers come from a diverse assortment of disciplines, which influences their interpretation of what case study means. This variety in definitions and approaches makes

case study flexible, but it can also make it confusing for researchers to apply in specific ways. In this section, I will explore the ways in which case study has evolved, variations in method, and summarize its suitability for a study of SEL in art education.

Contemporary case study research has roots in the traditionally qualitative disciplines of anthropology, history, psychology, and sociology (Merriam, 2006). Early examples of case study in research can be dated to the biography of Charles Darwin published in the early nineteenth century (Stewart, 2014). However, most of the development in research which contributed to the current definitions of case study research occurred throughout the twentieth century beginning with ethnographic studies of cultures and individuals (Merriam, 1998). Perhaps one of the earliest and most well-known examples of these studies is the anthropological work of Malinowski in 1913. His case study research in the Trobriand Islands of Melanesia and publications made him a pioneer in the field of anthropology and furthered the popularization of quantitative methods for social science study. By the 1960s and 70s, although quantitative data was still considered to be more scientifically sound, qualitative data collection was continuing to gain popularity as a method of “descriptive research to study a specific phenomenon” (Merriam, 2006). Although suitable for specific studies, case study research is inherently unable to be generalized and repeated. For this reason, many in the scientific research community still consider case study research to carry limited validity. However, what one researcher sees as limited, another may see as an opportunity for expansion. In the 1970’s, education research embraced case study as a method of evaluating curriculum design. (Merriam, 2006) It is these roots in educational research and curriculum study

that drew me to case study methodology. In a very simplistic approach to defining case study, Merriam (2006) defines it as “an intensive analysis of an individual unit (person or community) stressing developmental factors in relation to environment” (p.103). The ability to be defined in simple terms does not mean that the methodology itself is simple, far from it. A major challenge in case study is the lack of agreement among researchers about if it is defined as a method or a methodology. Methods are the more practical element of research and encompass the procedures and techniques used to collect data. Methodology is the broader lens with a researcher views their study and uses it to make decisions about the method. In my opinion, case study fits more easily into the definition of methodology. Having a methodology like case study is useful for shaping the direction of a study for a researcher, but it can leave room for inconsistent data collection methods. Therefore, it was my desire to establish a method for data collection within the framework of case study methodology which would direct my interview protocol.

NARRATIVE INQUIRY

The telling of histories has been a way for humans to gather information since the beginning of time. These stories we share with one another and pass through generations create meaning in our lives and build a strong foundation for culture. In spite of the history of narrative as a record, storytelling as a means of data collection in social science research is fairly new. Much like the ambiguity surrounding case study methodology, narrative can refer to both the subject of study and the method in which it is observed. However, unlike case study, narrative inquiry proposes a much more direct pattern for

inquiry and the presentation of data. Thinking about experience through the lens of research methodology has given qualitative researchers the field of narrative inquiry.

Narrative itself is not new to scholarship. It was most common for historical and sociological research dating back to the early 19th century to take narrative forms, particularly in the presentation of information. (Toelken, 1996) However, it wasn't until the latter half of the 20th century when narrative began to be considered as a valid form of research across disciplines. It was initially introduced into the field of literary criticism by Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye, who wrote much on the topic of narrative structure. (Frye, 2006) These early presentations of narrative as a legitimate form of inquiry were part of the postmodern movement and received heavy criticism from formalists. Those with more traditional approaches to research felt that narrative inquiry presented an overly literary view of what they saw as a very scientific discipline. Critics felt that "history was not a literary genre but a disciplined inquiry whose goal is knowledge. Narrative is merely the way, indeed only one way, in which its results are 'written up' for public consumption. (Carr, 1986, p.9)". This approach to research certainly may not fit well with the exploration and perhaps even presentation of more scientific studies, but I felt that a narrative exploration would fit well into case study methodology. Traditionally, social science studies emphasized the importance of a researcher's detachment from their subjects in order to maintain an objective perspective. However, since I wanted the data I gathered to be applicable to art educators, it was necessary to break down that barrier. Part of that process is the awareness that one story which has impacted the subject might also impact the reader in similar ways. This

requires a degree of self-knowledge or awareness, as the reader interprets the data and decides how it will affect their own practice. Amelia Fleming is an art educator implementing social and emotional learning into her classroom practices. Some of what she found to be effective and ineffective may be applied in other classrooms, but some findings are specific to this case study. This is the ambiguous beauty of both case study methodology and narrative inquiry, and it is reliant on the reader's reflection of themselves. The need for reader and researcher introspection in digesting this study made it seem a natural fit for the topic of social and emotional learning. As one is reading about how best to guide their students towards emotional intelligence and social understanding, they must reflect on their own competencies in those areas also.

STUDY LOCATION AND PARTICIPANT

The focus of this study was one elementary art classroom at Austin Best School in Austin, Texas. Austin Best School is a public, tuition-free charter elementary school for the Texas Education Agency's Region 13 in the Austin ISD. It serves students from Kindergarten through 8th grade and in the 2016-2017 school year, 556 students attended ASD. The school was founded in 2004 by a group of parents, educators, and an educational psychologist and was awarded a charter to open its doors in 2005. Their mission is to be "an academically rigorous public charter dedicated to fostering compassion, collaboration, and critical thinking through engaging the natural world". (ABS, 2018) What really drew me to focus on this school for my research was its emphasis on social and emotional learning integration throughout the whole school. SEL

is a core value at Austin Best School and they implement it from the top down. It was my expectation that SEL would be integrated into the curriculum of such a school, which I did not find to be the case. While they do focus on relevant project-based learning, SEL is taught mainly through conscious discipline, positive behavior systems/interventions (PBIS), and restorative practices. I was familiar with the theory of conscious discipline, which I discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 of this study. However, I was not entirely familiar with PBIS or restorative practices. Austin Best School goes into these two focuses at some length on their website, making them sound quite naturally integrated into the school systems. They have three administrators for the SEL program specifically, including a director that has a background in educational psychology. Additionally, I chose this school because of the diverse demographic makeup of its student population. According to the Texas Tribune, 34.5% of the students at ABS are considered at risk of dropping out of school. (Texas Tribune, 2018) According to a study published by the University of California, Los Angeles (Rumberger, 2001) the influential factors that determine what percentage of students are considered at risk for dropping out focuses on student's families, schools, communities, and peers. This study also discusses the differences in dropout rates among social groups, particularly in racial and ethnic minorities (Rumberger, 2001). As part of Region 13, students who started eighth grade in 2006 had a college graduation rate of 23.5 percent. (Texas Tribune, 2018) There is a nearly equal number of students in this district considered to be disadvantaged as there are not disadvantaged. There was a study done by Dr. Chandrakant Jamadar in 2015 investigating the impact of socio-economic status on emotional intelligence and creativity

among tribal adolescent students in Karnataka. About half of the population there contribute to the workforce. More than 85 percent of the working population live in rural areas, leaving the country in a precarious economic climate. (Jamadar, 2015) In regard to the emotional state of adolescents there, “there is a world-wide trend for the present generation to be more troubled emotionally than the last; more lonely and depressed; more angry and unruly; more impulsive and angry; and more nervous and prone to worry” (Goleman, 1995). The youth in Karnataka are not exempt from the effects of this emotional crisis among youth. However, due to their lack of access to education and the measures of poverty in the country, there seems to be poor self-concept and low self-esteem among youth that is contributing to generally low emotional intelligence. This study also showed an interesting correlation among students of low socio-economic status between poor emotional intelligence and a decrease in measurable creativity. This is clearly an extreme example of how socio-economic status affects the emotional intelligence of children and adolescents. However, areas like Region 13 in Austin can experience many of the same emotional difficulties in youths due to circumstances outside the children’s control. This is where I believe social and emotional learning being implemented, specifically in creative classrooms, can have the greatest impact on student’s futures.

Not only did the school meet the requirements that I was looking for in SEL programming, but one of the art educators working at ABS was a former graduate of my art education graduate program at the University of Texas. Amelia Fleming had gone to work for the Austin Best School upon completion of her graduate program the year

earlier. I will disclose here at the beginning of this section that at the time this study was conducted, Amelia was no longer working for ABS and had moved on to another position with the University of Texas. However, after discussing my study with her over email, I still felt that she would have valuable insights to contribute. Amelia has a background in studio art and art history, as well as a graduate degree in art education. She had also taught art to students in various programs throughout her undergraduate and graduate studies. While at ABS she taught elementary art to grades K-4 and implemented all of the SEL practices encouraged by the school. She not only contributed a number of great insights regarding SEL to this study, but also offered some powerful advice for beginning art educators which I will share in Chapter 4. Through this study, Amelia became a good friend and mentor as I begin my own career in art education with a focus on SEL. I am grateful for her willingness to participate and her candor regarding some of the difficulties she encountered along the way.

DATA COLLECTION

Both case study methodology and narrative inquiry represent a shift in educational research, which is no longer depends solely on statistics to innovate our practice. Determining what works best in classrooms doesn't come with a distinct formula when each classroom, educator, and student vary so widely. Statistics may always have a place in changing policies on a larger scale, but I believe that narrative driven data can have the most significant impact on teachers and students.

The data collection phase was key to this study; as it provided the narrative from which information concerning SEL implementation occurred. I first reached out to Amelia Fleming and asked whether she would allow me to buy her a coffee and discuss what the intention was for this study. I felt that a face-to-face meeting to discuss the study before we went forward with the interview would prevent her from feeling a professional obligation to participate. I developed a short ten-question interview protocol ahead of time for her to look over, as well as a consent form for participation in my study. I wanted to keep my interview protocol quite general and leave room for Amelia to present a narrative of her experience at Austin Best School. We met during the afternoon at a coffee shop near the University of Texas campus here in Austin. It was still unusually warm for November; and as I stood inside waiting for her to arrive in the sunlight of a window, I wished I had sacrificed some of the professionalism of my outfit for something more comfortable. When Amelia arrived, she immediately put me at ease, and it was like meeting with a friend I hadn't seen in a long while. She has a warm and friendly likeability to her, and I could see what had drawn her to arts education. I knew I would have loved to have her as an elementary art teacher when I was young, and I couldn't wait to hear about her experiences with SEL. We chatted for a while in the coffee shop, and I often found myself wanting to shout, "Stop! Save it for the interview!". I gave her a copy of the interview protocol and asked her to look it over, but asked her to keep in mind that I wanted the interview style to be unstructured. When writing the protocol, I had purposefully left the majority of the questions open-ended to allow for a more natural interaction to help draw out detailed responses about her experiences regarding SEL. A

semi-structured interview allows the researcher to identify similar themes across individual responses regarding the topic. This approach allows for flexibility in the length and sometimes the focus of the response. It also can provide the possibility for the subject to stray away from the focus of the study, so the researcher must remain on track and guide the subject back if need be.

Amelia and I met for our formal interview at a coffee shop about a week after our initial meeting with one another. Once we had ordered and taken our seats, I started by collecting her consent form for the interview and then we began recording. In the interview with Amelia, unwritten questions and individual anecdotes about students arose and lent a feel of authenticity to the information regarding SEL that she presented. The interview proved to be lengthy and full of material relevant to the effectiveness of social and emotional learning in an art classroom, which I will elaborate more fully on in Chapter 4. To identify emerging themes in the narrative, this interview was transcribed and analyzed using in vivo coding and inductive analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

Since qualitative research is not simply the collection and presentation of facts and figures, it requires some interpretation on the part of the researcher. The goal of analysis for a case study is to identify implicit and explicit ideas that emerge from the interview process and highlight certain reoccurring themes. It is imperative for the researcher to discard any preconceived ideas about what this interview will reveal about their research before they begin the process of data analysis. The old idiom is true, what

you are looking for you will find. The process of combing through qualitative data is identified as inductive analysis. It consists of coding and sorting the data in order to classify it. For this study, I used a transcript of my interview with Amelia to conduct inductive data analysis, as well as notes taken during the interview, and educational materials provided by Amelia. Using inductive analysis takes the researcher on a reflective process that assists in the connection of outcomes to central research questions. The interpretation of the coding done with my transcript included a selection of themes and how frequently these themes reoccurred in our interview. As a result, themes emerged which I did not anticipate at the start of my study. However, I feel that these emergent ideas make this study a more practical resource for art educators seeking to implement SEL.

VALIDITY

In research, validity refers to whether the findings of a study are accurately supported by the evidence presented through the data. Traditionally, validity is able to be generalized and peer reviewed. In qualitative research, validity is developed through the investigation of social facts which have an objective reality and relationships which can be measured. (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.7) In this particular case study, the measurement was conducted through the interview with Amelia. The criteria for establishing validity is rooted in positivist theory, which has been defined by the systematic approach researchers take in establishing said validity. (Winter, 2000) Wainer and Braun (1998) describe validity in qualitative research as “construct validity”. This

means that the initial hypothesis or research question determines which data is collected and how it is collected. However, although case study research is qualitative, it is the collection and examination of the data which determines the validity of a central research question. Therefore, in case study methodology, a researcher may find the data collected to be contradictory to the direction of their research question. Since the case study involves a small data group, the exact circumstances and findings of the case are not considered to be replicable. Replicating results would traditionally establish reliability in most other methodologies. What a case study researcher is looking for is if data provided by the subject could be found in another separate instance, without replicating the exact circumstances. This would mean that the case study would be transferable instead of replicable. Secondly, with regards to validity, the means of measurement must be accurate and must measure what they are intending to measure. In case study, this requires both the interview protocol and the data analysis to be entirely unbiased. The researcher cannot be asking questions or inferring data to support their initial theory about the study. In this case, I was searching for the ways in which an art educator could promote social and emotional learning through informal interaction and formally through curriculum. I collected this information through narrative inquiry with Amelia and analyzed this data without directing it towards my initial hypothesis. This approach to case study methodology confirms the validity of the research process and allows for irregularities in data to arise, which can lead to new points of interest and opportunities for further investigation. I did encounter unexpected findings in my interview with Amelia that I will discuss in detail in Chapter 4. As this is a single case study, and the

data set was quite small, it was not possible for me to generalize my findings. However, it is my hope that this study has significant transferability for any art educators looking to incorporate SEL in their own classrooms.

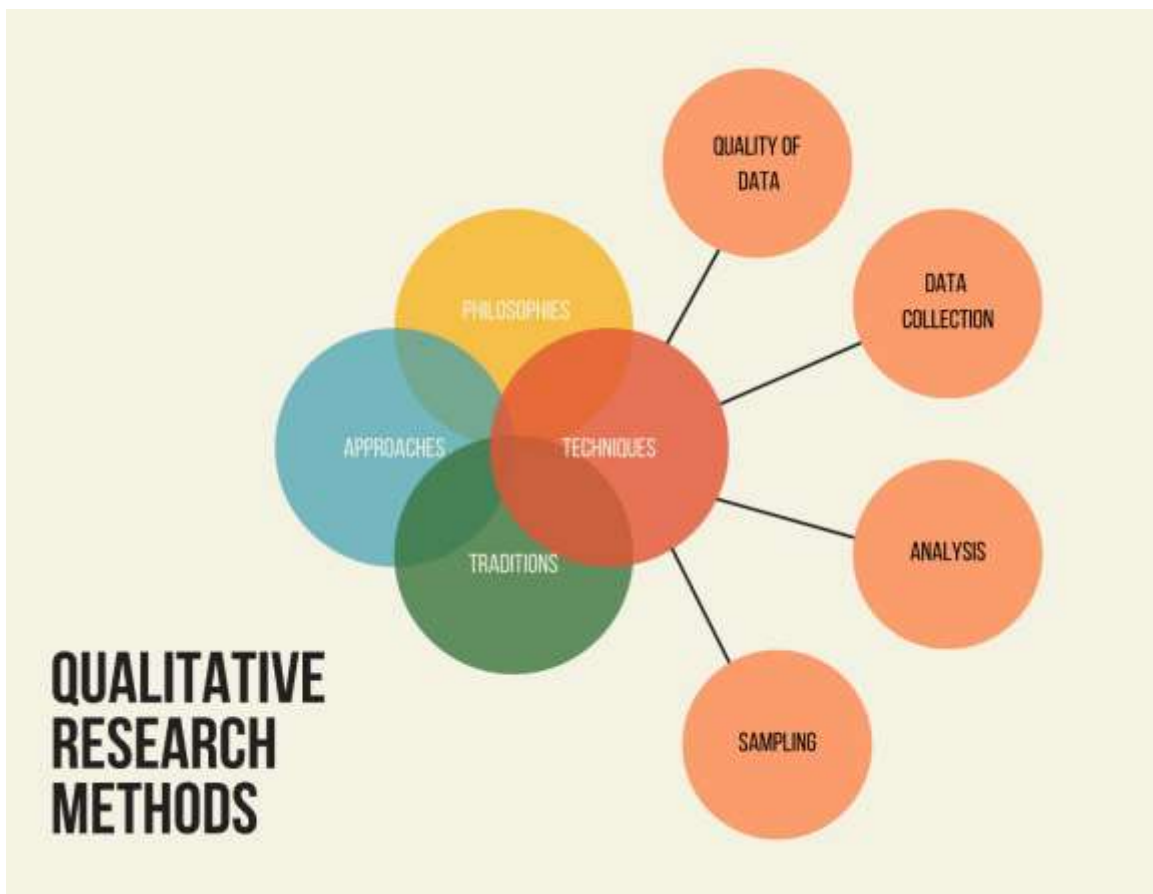


Figure 3: Qualitative Research Methods Graphic (Clandinin, 2006).

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an examination of data collected from an interview held with art educator Amelia Fleming on November 16, 2018. By sharing her stories of social and emotional learning implementation in her art classroom over the course of one year, my goal is to record and share a collection of best practices which have shown the greatest success in Amelia's own teaching practice. I have organized this chapter from general to specific SEL applications. First, we take a look at application of a social emotional program at a school. Next, we dive deeper into how SEL is applied in classroom management through conscious discipline and why this is a core tenant of social emotional learning. Finally, I will give specific examples of how Amelia was able to apply SEL learning in an art classroom. Through this interview and analysis, my intent is to shed light on the realities of social emotional learning in the art classroom, share one teacher's perspective and tried and true approaches, to establish an understanding of how social emotional learning is applied in an art classroom so that readers can make their own connections to the unique needs of their students. The results that emerged from this study showed that social and emotional learning in a creative environment can contribute to student's personal emotional growth and ability to relate and connect well with others.

INTERVIEW

SEL Implementation at ABS

In Chapter Three I addressed the reasons I selected Amelia as my research participant and what drew me to Austin Best School as a location. Therefore, this section outlines a few of the ways the school is implementing SEL before I begin presenting the data which was collected from my interview with Amelia. It is important to consider the framework before discussing Amelia's experience implementing SEL.

Austin Best School has a Social Emotional Learning program which was created by charter founding member Dr. Deb Helper³. Dr. Helper is in charge of all student related discipline at ABS, which is something that is strongly integrated at the core of the SEL program. Reporting to her is a behavioral specialist, Susie Barker who is also in charge of mentoring teachers in SEL practices. Amelia shared that it was typical to have bi-weekly or monthly group meetings with the SEL program support staff, which would take place in the evening after school and mainly involved viewing SEL training videos together. Many of these videos would detail best practices for conscious discipline, which is a topic I will elaborate on later in this chapter. In addition to Dr. Helper and the elementary behavioral specialist, there was also a middle school social worker who worked mostly with grades 5-8 but would sometimes be involved with elementary issues as well. Under those three individuals, the key component of the program was something

² It is common in qualitative studies to use a pseudonym in order to protect the privacy of individuals who have not given their consent for participation in the study. The names of the individuals at ABS have been changed.

called the “peace center”. This was staffed by two full-time staff members who reported to the three individuals previously mentioned in charge of the SEL program. The peace center is essentially the basis of all disciplinary measures and behavioral interventions which occur at the school. When teachers face behavior issues with students which they are not able to resolve within the classroom setting, students are sent to the peace center to work through their issues under the guidance of the two staff members. The main function of the peace center is to facilitate what they refer to as “restorative circles”. These circles are primarily used to resolve conflicts between students, rather than employ traditional disciplinary measures such as detention or suspension. Amelia explained that these restorative circles would include all students involved in a conflict, as well as parents depending on the severity of the situation. Occasionally this process would also be used to resolve issues between teachers. There would be an object called the talking piece, such as a ball, which would be passed from person to person so that the person holding the object would have a chance to tell their side of the story. For example, Amelia shared a story where this method of conflict resolution worked well. She explained:

Kids argue with one another about things. One time, a group of students pulled another boy’s pants down. These little boys, everyone is upset, so they get sent to the peace center. So, when that little boy got to talk in the peace circle he said, “You all really hurt my feelings. I thought you were my friends, and you all really hurt my feelings.” Everyone in the peace circle cried. All these little boys cried and were like, “We’re so sorry, we thought it was going to be funny and then it wasn’t.” So instead of everybody getting in trouble, everybody got to have their talking moment. (A. Fleming, personal communication, November 16, 2018)⁴

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all communications in this chapter come from a personal communication with Amelia Fleming on November 16, 2018.

This was an effective example of the restorative circle because it allowed the students to develop an understanding for one another's actions and feelings. Because of this understanding, they were able to reach a resolution with very little staff involvement in the situation. Therefore, clear communication is the most direct example of how SEL is integrated, through strategies such as the peace circle, into an educational setting. Teaching conflict resolution supports SEL competencies, primarily social awareness and relationship skills. In addition, the restorative circle is a way in which educators can encourage empathetic development in their students.

Beyond the peace center and restorative circles, Austin Best School also implemented the use of a strategy they call the "safe place". The safe place is an area within each classroom students could go if they were feeling overwhelmed, angry, or needed a little break from a situation. This was a de-escalation space for situations which didn't need the structure of the peace center. In the safe place there are resources to help students identify and manage their own emotions and calm down. Some of these materials include guides on five-finger breathing, or an activity where the student would pretend to blow up a balloon to regulate their breath. All of these resources assist students in self-management, geared toward when they are feeling overwhelmed. Once again, this safe space is an example of a strategy that helps build SEL competencies and can be implemented in any classroom setting.

The peace center, restorative circles, and safe spaces are all examples of how SEL was implemented at Austin Best School. These SEL practices supported and

implemented school-wide at ABS and are beginning to be adopted by many school districts across the country, including large urban public school districts near ABS. The purpose of presenting the supported practices first in this chapter was to give the reader an idea of how social emotional learning is integrated at ABS from the top down. Although both the peace center and safe places within the classroom do produce direct benefits for some students, there were challenges in these approaches which will be discussed in Chapter 5. However, school-wide SEL programs are not always possible. Educators can still achieve ~~great~~ success with the methods Amelia used in her classroom if their school does not have an SEL program. The next section explores how an educator might apply SEL strategies to classroom management without the support of a schoolwide SEL program.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

In Chapter 2, I introduced the concept of conscious discipline. Conscious discipline means that, instead of having a discipline system based on rewards and punishments, discipline is based on principles such as respect, honesty, empathy, etc... (Fay & Funk, 1995). Each disciplinary incident is treated uniquely, and each child is addressed individually. In a traditional disciplinary approach, there is an action which receives a pre-determined consequence. For example, drawing weapons or violence in an art class will warrant a referral to the office and a pre-determined consequence for breaking school policy. Approaching the situation through conscious discipline might look like having a conversation with the child about why they were using imagery that

violated school-policy and why their drawing might make others feel unsafe in school. The emphasis is to build understanding and empathy with the student and prevent the behavior from reoccurring. It is the responsibility of each child to resolve their own problems and take responsibility for their actions. Although ABS also implements project-based learning, they mainly implements SEL through conscious discipline, positive behavior systems/interventions/PBIS, and restorative practices. The SEL program at ABS as a whole is focused on teaching competencies such as self-management before challenging behavior arises. This preventative approach presents behavioral problems as an opportunity to teach.

In the beginning of my interview with Amelia, I asked her what drew her to take a job at Austin Best School. She explained that what really attracted her to ABS was their motto and their approach to learning, specifically their focus on environmental education and social emotional learning program. She liked that the inclusion of these types of programs meant that the school was focused more on the overall development of the child rather than solely on testing. She said, “We’re not just looking for someone who is marking the boxes. They’re trying to create a more holistic student. That really attracted me to it and I’m kind of hippy dippy so it felt like it was going to be the perfect fit for me.” Pairing this quote alongside the mission statement on the ABS website, it really seems as though a holistic approach is the primary focus of the school. Their mission is that “Students in our program master the skills necessary to demonstrate social responsibility, good health, and environmental responsibility while creating and pursuing rigorous academic goals. There is a natural harmony when we come to appreciate and

respect others, ourselves, and the environment we live in. By focusing on the whole child, ABS benefits our whole society” (Austin Best School, 2017). In many ways, SEL implementation supports the ideals on which the school was founded.

I also asked Amelia how she thought social emotional learning played into the three primary models for education. These are: subject centered, student centered, and society centered. Educators typically lean more towards one of these focuses than the others, and it directs how they choose to teach. Amelia shared that she believed SEL to be primarily focused on the student. She was using approaches such as restorative practices and project-based learning that aligned with many of the goals for SEL before she formally studied or read about social emotional learning. She explained, “As an SEL teacher you really have to make sure you are also considering yourself as a student, because your teaching is based on your students’ response. So, if you are not able to emotionally involve yourself, you can’t really expect your students to take on these strategies that you can’t implement in your own life.”

This quote from Amelia brings us to my first point concerning best SEL practices, which is that the teacher implementing SEL in their classroom must have a grounded sense of self-reflection. This is necessary in order to effectively pass these skills on to their students. In fact, self-awareness is one of the primary competencies SEL intends to teach. It is important to push ego aside and model what it looks like to identify and manage our own emotions and monitor interactions as educators. I am not talking about “self-care” here, although that practice is certainly important for educators. Teaching SEL is largely about modeling the skills you are trying to build with the students.

Conscious discipline requires the educator to have an awareness of the challenge of implementing SEL-based strategies through classroom management. Amelia talked about some misbehavior from students, and how difficult it was to embrace SEL in these kinds of interactions. One example of student behavior and how Amelia addressed the situation is an interaction she had with a second-grader named Keenan. Keenan was what we would classically refer to as the class clown and he lived to make his classmates laugh. However, students like Keenan can be distracting to other learners. He has a habit of making wise cracks while sitting on the class rug when Amelia was attempting to explain a lesson. Addressing this misbehavior with him face to face was an opportunity for her to implement conscious discipline. The serious tone of these conversations clearly made him uncomfortable which he would again mask with humor, making it difficult for Amelia to have an earnest conversation about behavior changes. Heartbreakingly, another teacher became so frustrated with Keenan's behavior that she told the student he wasn't funny so he should stop making jokes. Amelia noted that it is important not to take a student's behavior personally and remember that no matter how bad the behavior, these are children. In contrast, Amelia checked her own frustrations and took time to invest in the student. She told him that she wanted him to give her full attention when she was giving instruction for the benefit of his education, but the key to this intervention was what she told him after that. She made it clear that each time they had a conversation about his behavior, he started that interaction with a clean slate. She was not keeping track of his wrongs and adding them together or thinking about the last class period all week. The next week he got to start over with her and have the opportunity to do better.

She also suggested to the staff at the peace center that if Keenan had really good behavior, they might get him a joke book and give him the opportunity to write jokes. This is an example of investing so deeply in a student that the educator is able to understand the root of their behavior and not only discipline but encourage good behavior through their interests. Amelia would not have been able to connect with this student so well had she harbored the frustration she felt towards him. Her own self-awareness and emotional control allowed her SEL implementation to have the impact she intended. For Amelia, acknowledging her students as individuals was incredibly important. In our interview she said, “Kids appreciate when they’re acknowledged. And I think that’s the most important part of SEL; you’re just acknowledging that they feel something. You’re not telling someone, ‘It’s time to move on.’ or ‘Your feelings aren’t really hurt.’ Because who likes to be told that?” Amelia told me that unless you respect feelings in yourself and in students, SEL is a hard approach to adopt. This may mean that as educators we need to re-address how we acknowledge others; approaching discipline in a new way starts with us.

Amelia balanced understanding of her student’s needs and behavior and enforcing structure in her classroom. Social and emotional learning can often be a difficult balance of offering empathy and support to students and enforcing the structure with the students who aren’t responding to the SEL approach. Although Amelia found it beneficial to redirect inappropriate behavior by talking with the student, if the behavior wasn’t changing in response to these conversations, then Amelia found it hard to implement conscious discipline. Conscious discipline is beneficial to most students; but it is also

time-consuming and limits the opportunity for everyone in the classroom to learn when one student requires special attention for behavioral issues. Amelia said, “That’s where the structure is required, because some kids need reminders. Dealing with Kindergarten, first and second grade, there is room for a lot of mistakes, so they sometimes require more attention than I have time to give.” Within the structure of conscious discipline, there is a margin of error in the freedom that sometimes allows students to repeat poor behavior over and over. Amelia explained that even when she would talk with students one on one, it was her goal to be understanding but also teach the students that they are responsible for their own behavior. Even with Kindergarten students that have short attention spans, Amelia would reinforce that it was the student’s choice to misbehave, regardless of the circumstances of the situation. I asked her for an example of a student, who was not typically a trouble-maker, that showed a behavioral improvement as a result of conscious discipline.

She shared a story about a group of first grade girls whom she really enjoyed having in her classroom. They were sweet little girls and lovely artists who were very engaged in her classroom. She hadn’t had any behavioral issues with these girls before, but one week they were especially chatty in class and obstructing classroom learning. Amelia had to ask the whole class to work in silence for the rest of the period, which is not her favorite classroom environment, in order to maintain focus within this particular group. She pulled them aside after class and expressed that she was disappointed in their behavior that day, but that next week they were in charge of having a different outcome. A week later one came to Amelia and told her that she was sorry for her disruption last

week and that she was going to try so much harder today. This is the desired response to behavioral intervention that SEL is aiming to achieve. However, it is not always so successful and often depends on the support the school system provides to students who take advantage of the system.

Amelia told me about another student who was not responsive as the former example. This student had a reputation among all the teachers for having a short temper and explosive behavior. Amelia said that this child was so temperamental she often felt like she was walking on eggshells to prevent an outburst from derailing the whole class. She had the sense that the student knew he was able to control others through his behavior, and he presented major problems for some of the other teachers at ABS. He was able to take advantage of the SEL system and perhaps would have benefitted from a more structured environment. Amelia always made sure to talk with him while he was having a good day or if she saw him in the hallway in order to build rapport. She also made it clear that she believed in his ability to show control. She would often say things to him such as, “We’re doing glitter this week, and I know you can be responsible.” She worked to build their relationship anytime she could, sometimes even giving him the role of classroom helper. Occasionally these strategies were fruitful and he behaved well and was invested in classroom activities, but she had to work so hard just to create an environment where he did not explode. The approaches used with the student aligned with SEL, but they still gave the student the power to use his behavior to manipulate others. Ultimately, student’s choices make the difference between whether or not conscious discipline is effective. The group of girls in the first grade knew and respected

the rules but had a day when they weren't able to do their best. For students like this a simple conversation can encourage them to start fresh the next time and try harder. Other students have a much more difficult time controlling their emotions or actions and require firm consequences to alter their behavior. Conscious discipline requires an empathetic and restorative approach as well as traditional means of discipline. Having both behavioral systems supported by administration allows teachers to address how much support and structure each student needs to be successful.

I want to note here that although conscious discipline plays an important role in social and emotional learning and is a core standard for the SEL program at Austin Best School, it is not the primary focus for SEL. SEL is about developing the student as a whole person. This means that emotional growth and social understanding is being taught as part of the curriculum in the classroom. When I began this research, it was my goal to seek out specific art curriculum that focused on teaching SEL competencies alongside art content. What I was searching for simply does not exist at this time, because SEL is better defined as an approach to learning than as an instructional strategy. Implementing social and emotional learning begins with each educator and weaves its way into the existing culture of the classroom. Therefore, SEL approaches are nuanced and different for each district, school, and educator. This strategy begins with embracing individuality, which makes the art classroom an ideal environment to implement SEL approaches.

SEL IN AN ART CLASSROOM

Based on the results of this research with one art teacher, there are many reasons the art classroom is a natural place to begin implementing SEL strategies. Instruction in art classrooms mirrors the balance of freedom and structure that SEL provides cultivating children's creative spirits. There is more independent time with students than in a typical classroom, so teachers are often able to naturally cultivate relationships with their students. For example, sometimes Amelia's class would draw together or do guided step-by-step drawing, but she always provided the opportunity to make the project their own. They would draw the same subject together, but there was room to be creative and students were encouraged to include unique details. This provided Amelia with the opportunity to talk with each student and really get to know them, whereas some of the other teachers in her school would only really know the students with behavioral problems. She knew every student's name and tried to form a connection to every student, even those she did not click with naturally. This emotional investment seemed to make the difference in the effectiveness of SEL implementation in her art classroom. Amelia shared a particularly touching story of student transformation early in our interview. She said:

I had one student; we'll call her Iris. Iris was a very sweet little girl but didn't have very much confidence and she spoke very slowly. Her brother was in the third or fourth grade and was also very nice, so I knew that her family life seemed very normal. But Iris did just seem a little shyer and less confident than some of her peers. So, we did self-portraits at the beginning of the year for the first grade using shapes. We started the portraits together in oil pastel and then everybody got to paint them however they wanted. I felt like that project gave them a real sense of self-identity and most of the kids loved it. When Iris started hers, she hated it. I was like, "But why? Tell me why you hate it. You have all the things I asked for in this project. It had to have two eyes and a nose, and you have those, it looks great!" It's

something I learned from Cassie Stevens, actually, to say, “Well, why don’t you...” Especially when you guide their drawing. “Well, why don’t you finish this one as practice? And at the end I’ll give you another paper.” The chances of somebody getting to the end and wanting another paper are slim. So, I was encouraging her to keep on with the practice, and also not waste materials. I like making kids focus on what they can do to fix their mistakes instead of just starting over. So, Iris got really sad and started crying. She not only didn’t want to fix it, but she didn’t even want to start over. She was just done with the project. She was just really self-deprecating, such a sad little muffin. But the next week we would start again, and I just really worked on encouraging her. Throughout the year, she got more confident with her marks. Then three-quarters through the year she would make a mistake and then call me over to show me how she had fixed it. Giving her these opportunities, listening to her, making sure she knew that I cared about what she was telling me made a difference. My SEL approach created an environment that was safe to experiment, to mess up. Also, to make some changes and be proud of how you made those changes.

This story was one of my favorites that Amelia shared with me because it demonstrated how SEL helped Iris to become a more confident creator, and it also improved her self-management skills. Stick-to-itiveness and problem-solving are important personal skills that many children are simply never taught. Introducing SEL through art making, especially at an early age, can have lasting effects on a child’s overall academic performance and allow their creativity to thrive in the art classroom. For another project towards the end of the year, Amelia had the students all make small houses from cardstock. Their houses had to meet certain criteria such as a minimum height and having a roof for the project to be complete. The students who didn’t really enjoy art class just checked all those boxes, completing what was required. Iris added creative and unique details like a slide to her house, definitely not something she would have done at the beginning of the year. This is why encouraging students to work their way through

problems using creative thinking and perseverance is one way to support best SEL practices.

Amelia had another student in one of her classes, Luther, who was experiencing an undiagnosed attention deficit disorder. He simply could not sit still, which is common in many children, but was so extreme that it impaired Luther's learning experience in the traditional classroom. Writing was especially hard for him. However, he absolutely thrived in Amelia's art classroom, where it was apparent that his creativity was appreciated and welcomed. When it came time for Valentine's Day season, the class studied several contemporary artists and then made patterned hearts with paper arms or legs inspired by these artists. Amelia told me that she was immensely proud of Luther's heart in particular because it was so unique. In fact, she told him "Oh, this is special. You've got some talent. You didn't copy that. You didn't look at mine and make one similar; this came from your brain." At the end of that project, Amelia said that Luther was hesitant to hang his heart up with the rest of the class because his project looked so different than his peers. But Amelia encouraged him, telling him that being different in artmaking makes you special and it's wonderful to celebrate creativity. Not only were her words encouraging to Luther but being in a classroom where it was acceptable to get up, move around, and make a mess supported his personal development. In Amelia's words, "You're encouraged to be more yourself in art." Indeed, it is important for teachers to connect with their students in order for SEL to be effective. Celebrating a child's uniqueness is a key component for effective implementation and creative environments where students feel safe to be an individual and lend themselves to this goal.

Many of the competencies that Amelia and I discussed, such as self-awareness and emotional regulation, had to do more with the self-reflective side of social and emotional learning. However, the component of teaching interpersonal relational skills in school cannot be overlooked. Again, this approach fits particularly well into how many art teachers set up instruction. Before Amelia taught at Austin Best School, she taught a summer course in sewing and fashion to middle school students for three weeks. They were local students in the Boston area, along with a large group of international students. Collectively, they spoke about ten different languages. Although Amelia is not fluent in all the languages spoken in her classroom, she built relationships with these students, something she notes fits into the SEL approach. She began each class with a word of the day Amelia had chosen, which she would teach in sign language. Her rationale for using sign language, a language she is comfortable with but not fluent in, is she felt it could be something for all the students from different backgrounds to learn together. After learning the sign, each student could take an opportunity to share the word in a language they knew. That was something she referred to often as the “buy-in”. She wanted all of her students to feel invested in what they were learning and invested in one another. Amelia explained, “You get these students to emotionally invest so that they are open to hearing each other and working together and being collaborative. It also fostered an environment that was really positive.” There are many subjects that are factually driven, right or wrong. Granted, there are some art educators who interpret art in a similar manner; but collaborative learning provides opportunities to understand one another. Developing these attitudes within your classroom means that your students will “buy in”

to the creative process and invest in one another. Amelia feels that “SEL would be easily implemented if art educators as a whole agreed that it’s a grey area. It’s not right or wrong. We can make art with a little a; we can make art with a capital A.” I would add to this that it helps if we view our students not as empty vessels to be poured into, but as contributors to the education process. This student-centered approach to learning makes the classroom feel more like a community and allows students to open up and invest in one another.

In the same vein of cultivating relational skills in a classroom, collaboration is an excellent tool to implement SEL learning. Many educators implement group work in their classrooms, but they do it without a focus on social and emotional learning. Amelia implemented collaborative projects frequently in her teaching practice. It was a struggle, because some students would get really messy and other budding perfectionists wanted to color right inside the lines. As it is when professional artists collaborate on a project, there is always a clashing of different artistic styles. It is particularly hard for the student who has spent the period methodically drawing delicate lines to have their neighbor select one color and put it everywhere on the piece. However, letting students work with others who have different learning approaches, or are even frustrating to them, is a good connection with SEL because everyone has to work with individuals at some point who do things completely different from how we do them. This is part of developing social awareness and relationship skills, which are two pieces of the SEL competency pie. Encouraging conversation throughout these creative conflicts helps students to develop an understanding and empathy for other individuals. The ability to do this well in a

classroom under the guidance of an educator may have long-term effects on that person's ability to do it in relationships throughout their lives. Art teachers aren't just passing on technical knowledge, which is important, but through SEL we are helping students develop the ability to have successes in whatever field they choose.

CONCLUSION

While Chapter 3 highlighted SEL research, many of those studies overlook the struggles and successes real teachers experience when implementing SEL programs in schools. Throughout my interview with Amelia, she shared so many stories that demonstrated evidence of the success of social and emotional learning in her art classroom. Not only was she seeing real results from students, but she also presented some of the difficulties she faced and her thoughts on what could have made SEL even more successful at Austin Best School.

Through Amelia's interview and my subsequent analysis, the social and emotional learning approach clearly impacted students' personal development within an art classroom. The results that emerged from this study showed that social and emotional learning in a creative environment can impact students' emotional intelligence and ability to relate and connect well with others. Social and emotional learning programs are spreading throughout school districts, which represents a slight but encouraging shift in focus from the educational system. I appreciated Amelia's honesty and eagerness to share her best practices with me so that I could pass them on to other educators. It appears that social and emotional learning is rewarding but can be challenging to implement.

Therefore, this approach requires teacher's willingness to take a chance on a non-traditional approach to classroom education.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

There have been ample studies showing the benefits of social and emotional learning in education, but very little research has been done showing the benefits of SEL implementation in the art classroom. This research study with Amelia Fleming examined her experience at Austin Best School with their existing SEL program, including the challenges and benefits she saw in her own art classroom. This research examined the ways one art educator promoted social and emotional learning, both informally through interaction with peers and teachers, as well as formally through curriculum. The current American educational system has been failing to evaluate the psychological, emotional, and social development of children. Through SEL programming, teachers are able to develop students' social competencies and emotional intelligence. These skills are fundamental to brain development and cognitive abilities (National Scientific Counsel on the Developing Child, 2007). Furthermore, there is evidence that social and emotional intelligence, learned in childhood and adolescence, affect how individuals function as adults. (Brenner, Chen, and Mindness, 2008) Art classrooms provide a setting that engages students in open communication and expression which is supported by the personal attention provided by the teacher. Amelia emphasized in her interview that developing a relationship with students is key in implementing social and emotional learning. This research project demonstrated how one art educator supported her students' development of social and emotional competencies. Competencies taught through social and emotional learning have shown a positive effect on students' overall

learning, represented by a rise in test scores and overall intellectual development (Davidson, 2010). Social and emotional learning programs are educating students to be successful in their relationship with others.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

My intention for this study was to provide a summary of existing research supporting the benefits of social and emotional learning, collect the experiences of an art educator working at a school with an existing SEL program, and present some examples of best SEL practices for art educators interest in implementing social and emotional learning in their classroom. I wanted this collection and presentation of data to be relatable and applicable for art educators such as myself, and therefore chose a narrative approach to report the results of this case study. I also knew that to best answer my research question, it would be the most effective to conduct a qualitative study focused deeply on the experiences of one art teacher.

Chapter 2 presented existing research in the fields of both psychology and education which supports the implementation of SEL programs in schools. These studies showed that social and emotional development in children has measurable effects on both their academic performance as well as their personal success later in life. These quantitative results of previous studies demonstrated patterns useful in establishing the validity of SEL. However, these studies lacked research examining SEL success in creative classrooms such as visual art, music, or theater. I was curious as to how SEL could be implemented in a visual art classroom. For that reason, my research needed to

be conducted with an art teacher who was already implementing SEL strategies in their classroom. I feel incredibly lucky to have had the opportunity to interview Amelia, who could not have been more generous with her time and stories concerning social and emotional learning.

Amelia provided me with the information I was looking for from my case study. She was honest about the benefits and challenges of SEL, which I will present in the next section. Her interview was peppered with personal stories and examples of success from students. She also had some very practical advice for other educators interested in implementing SEL in their own classrooms. In short, my interview with Amelia showed that the best success can be found when individual teachers have the ability to model and reinforce SEL skills in their classroom with the support of administration. The next section clarifies why this administrative support is so critical, but it is worth noting that SEL seems to be less successful when implemented with a top-down approach in schools. This is primarily because every student is individual, so what may work well for some students may not work well for others.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF SEL

When it comes to outlining the benefits of social and emotional learning, particularly in art education, the intent of this chapter is to provide some real-life examples of students who benefitted from SEL in the art classroom. It is my goal that this section condenses additional benefits of SEL touched on in an earlier chapter. The primary benefit of social and emotional learning is that it supplements a student's

academic education by striving to develop the whole person. Many students are lucky enough to receive social and emotional support at home. They grow up in loving families who teach them all the social and emotional skills they need to be successful in life. However, there are many students who are lacking social and emotional education from their home environment. Even if a student has a wonderful and stable homelife, caregivers can only teach what they are competent in themselves. If a caregiver has not learned proper social awareness, how can they pass that skill to their child? This is where it is possible that the educational system can intervene. If the academic community can provide educators with SEL training and information, it will be possible for educators to apply research-based practices in their own classrooms.

A secondary benefit of SEL is that proper emotional development plays a key role in social adaptation. If a child has not learned how to understand and control their emotional responses, they have trouble differentiating between appropriate and inappropriate responses in social interactions. This can impede their ability to form meaningful relationships and even hinder their ability to work well with others later in life in professional settings. These poor post-educational outcomes are especially common among children with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders (EBD). A need for early intervention with social and emotional learning for these children has been well documented and having implemented SEL strategies with EBD students in the classroom, its efficacy with this population of children is certain (Lewis, Jones, Horner & Sugai, 2010). Self-regulation is one of the most important control mechanisms for thought, action, and emotion. Difficulties in self-regulation due to natural cognitive development,

as well as outside influences in childhood, have been found to predict a student's developmental outcome in academia. It has also been found that self-regulation affects a person's physical health, the likelihood of substance dependence, socioeconomic status, and the likelihood of a criminal conviction in adulthood (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Although this case study examined a short time frame, other studies point to the long-lasting effects that social-emotional development has on a person's life.

In addition to improving students' academic outcomes as well as developing their self-regulation and social adaptation, studies have shown that SEL could have an enormous impact on reducing the incidence of violence and bullying in schools. Beginning at an early age, SEL programs give students the tools they need to mediate their own conflicts facilitated by staff through places such as the peace center at ABS. For example, conscious discipline gives students the feeling that they are responsible for their actions and for the effect their actions might have on others. Additionally, restorative circles help students talk about issues they are experiencing with their peers and come to a resolution in a way that helps everyone to see things from another person's perspective. At Austin Best School, there was a safe space in each classroom where a student could go if they were feeling overwhelmed or frustrated and needed a moment to calm down. Each safe space provided tools to assist the students in self-regulation. These included activities such as guides to five-finger-breathing or pretending to blow up a balloon. In addition to providing students with conflict mediation and coping strategies, there is a significant emphasis in SEL programs on social integration. Ideally, if these programs are being facilitated well, this will help build a better sense of community

within the school which could prevent students from falling behind socially or feeling isolated from their peers. If these research-based practices are producing positive outcomes for students, why are SEL program not more widely implemented in schools? The answer is simply because education is a machine with a lot of moving parts and those parts happen to be human. If humans lack training and funds to support programming, this can prevent new educational practices from being implemented despite their merits. However, SEL can be successful in any classroom without the full support and funding from a school district as it begins with small changes an educator can make in their own classroom.

The challenges of implementing social and emotional learning in a classroom are somewhat inevitable, because every school and teacher has a different approach to this subject, and gaps occur even when we have the best of intentions. That being said, this section is not a critique of the Austin Best School. The challenges Amelia encountered hindered her ability to teach most effectively and for the SEL program at ABS to reach its full potential. No academic environment is going to be perfect, but there are some supports that make implementing social and emotional learning more effective.

The first difficulty that Amelia shared was that although social and emotional learning is intended to accommodate each child's individual differences, education has a tendency to take a more standardized approach to learning and discipline. She noted that a big piece of SEL learning is teaching students about the natural consequences of their actions. When you think about the concept in broad terms it seems like a wonderful thing to integrate into education as it encourages self-management and personal responsibility.

However, there are practical challenges Amelia encountered when trying to apply SEL principles like natural consequences in her art classroom. If a student was absent due to illness, the school viewed the missed assignments as a natural consequence for that absence. Amelia found it difficult to tell a Kindergartner that since they missed class, they couldn't take part in the activity because it was a natural consequence of their absence. Teaching about natural consequences encourages students' self-management and responsibility, which are both SEL competencies. However, if you are going to implement SEL programming, it must be in the spirit that it was intended which is to take an individualistic approach to education.

Amelia's second difficulty was balancing SEL implementation with time management in an elementary art classroom. Class periods, especially at the elementary level are incredibly limited. You may only see each class for 50 minutes or less once a week. Amelia found it nearly impossible to meet some of the requirements of the SEL program at Austin Best School without sacrificing her valuable classroom time. For example, teachers at her school were encouraged to try a simple form a conflict mediation within the classroom before sending students to the peace center. One such technique involved placing students on either side of a line of tape on the floor. Each time a student shared their perspective, they would take a step closer to the other person until a mediation was reached. This is a wonderful idea and teaches the students several SEL skills including empathy, relationship skills, and conflict resolution. However, it requires the classroom teacher to facilitate the mediation and therefore stops any instruction to focus on facilitating the mediation process. Perhaps in a regular classroom the teacher

would have time to stop and devote five or ten minutes to resolving a conflict between students, but losing any instructional time is difficult in an art classroom. Therefore, it may be more practical for specials teachers to be able to have that conflict mediated by another staff member outside the classroom so the instruction can continue.

The final and most important difficulty that Amelia faced at Austin Best School was that the SEL program was embraced as the only school discipline and classroom management model and there was simply no secondary support in case the system failed. Conscious discipline is an excellent approach that takes the differences of individuals into account and builds long-lasting personal competencies. However, it remains an *approach*. It doesn't work for everyone and without systems in place to support the students who slip through the cracks, it leaves those students even further behind. The safe place in classrooms worked well for some students and provided them with the tools and skills to identify and manage their own emotions when they felt overwhelmed. Other students used it as a means of escaping having to do work in the classroom and would manipulate Amelia into allowing them to remain there because that was the system in place for when they felt upset. There were similar issues with the peace center. There were no firm consequences for student actions beyond the peace center, so if the students were unsuccessful in resolving their conflict there or were unable to reach an agreement for a consequence, nothing was done and the students were sent back to class. If a student was sent to the peace center, there was a specific memo that the school wanted the classroom teacher to fill out and sent with the student which provided the facilitator with information about the incident or behavior. Amelia said that the form was so detailed and

time-consuming to fill out and the incident had to be pretty severe for a teacher to take the time to fill it out. The teachers weren't properly taught how to use the online incident form and because teachers have varying expectations or behaviors in their classrooms there were some incidents logged as office referrals that others would log as minor incidents. As with any system, there needs to be proper education on use and a general agreement on scaling incidents. There were no clear guidelines outlining the kinds of behavior that warrants a referral to the peace center versus what kind of behavior should be handled by the teacher in the classroom. Amelia reflected,

There was none of that. So if I had a student who had gone too far, I could write a peace center memo. Sometimes that would just be a sticky note. If they were of a certain age, I would send them and then we have walkie talkies in our classroom, that communicated to the peace center. Not every teacher had these walkie talkies. We didn't have an intercom system and so sometimes you would walkie talkie and nobody would respond to you and you would even be like, 'Hey, I'm sending you a kid, be on the lookout,' because we were in open buildings. Other incidences, when a child was throwing a tantrum in your room, like de-shelving your books, throwing scissors, you would call the peace center and ask for help. We also had no code system; you know what I mean? So if you had your walkie talkie turned on, you could hear like, 'Has anybody seen so and so?' Or 'I need help in here.'

The SEL approach at ABC was so encompassing that all other behavior management systems were abandoned and student safety became a concern. For a social emotional learning program or initiative to be successful, there needs to be a behavior management support to back it up in case it fails. Some children do not respond well to conflict mediation or other conscious discipline strategies, and that child is asking for a firmer boundary. The school and educator needs to be ready to accommodate and enforce consequences for the students who need them. Additionally, if SEL is being implemented

school-wide, the administration needs to make sure that expectations and policies are outlined clearly for both students, parent, and teachers. SEL has so many benefits for students, but we certainly cannot allow student safety and learning to be sacrificed.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Since this study was bound to one educator at one school, this study opens many avenues for further research. Although there is an abundance of studies on the benefits of social and emotional learning and the psychology of cognitive development as it relates to that field, there has been limited research into art education as a path to SEL. Scholars interested in pursuing similar investigations into SEL integration into art classrooms could produce additional information which could inform a more widespread implementation. While researching this topic, I found very little information about the connections between creativity and SEL learning. I am encouraged by the insights received from Amelia Fleming regarding the successful implementation of SEL strategies in the in the art classroom and the benefits she saw; however, my study did not compare other programs being integrated into other classrooms. It would be interesting to conduct a similar study at a school that was already implementing SEL but who had a higher population of “at-risk” students. I would also be interested to conduct a study with an art educator who was willing to begin implementing SEL strategies in her own classroom at a school without an existing SEL program. This might provide some support for my hunch that additional behavior management structures are necessary for success. I would also be interested to take a closer look at the success of students with

Emotional/Behavioral Disorders (EBD) in an art classroom where social emotional learning strategies were being implemented. I believe there is a great deal of room to expand the existing research on this topic and it is my most sincere hope that it continues, and that evidence-based practice continues to emerge from new studies.

PERSONAL CONCLUSION

The way educators interact with students is often influenced by their experiences, or what they were taught was most effective in terms of classroom management. A teacher might have a calm classroom and obedient students but may or may not be teaching relational skills. Amelia and I share the belief that social emotional learning can address classroom management and students' personal development. During our interview, we kept coming back to how discipline was addressed when we were students. Amelia has incredible energy and is talkative and bright. I imagine little Amelia wanted all her ideas and thoughts to be acknowledged and understood by her teachers. However, if you have a classroom full of Amelias, how can a teacher meet everyone's needs equitably? During our interview, we found ourselves discussing the educational systems which were in place when we were in school quite a bit and how SEL implementation might have benefitted us, despite the fact that we were very different children. Amelia summarized it well in one of these discussions concerning the balance of authority and freedom that often exists in classrooms. She said,

I love making all the kids feel important. There was a weird balance when I was a kid, and I'm sure when you were a kid too. The structure kept the bad ones in line but as a child you felt as though you had no power over anything. You weren't

important, your opinions didn't matter, keep your mouth shut and follow the rules. I feel like that approach stifles a lot of great creativity, so you find that kids are hesitant to express themselves. They're just like, "Oh I want to follow the rules so I don't get in trouble."

This resonated with me in particular because I was the quiet child who was absolutely terrified of getting in trouble, and quite honestly it made me afraid to step outside the box creatively in school. Getting admonished in any way was entirely spirit crushing for me as a child, and sometimes still resonates with me as an adult.

Allow me to digress with a personal story in order to highlight how SEL can address children's individual differences. The one time I vividly remember getting into trouble at school happened in the second grade. We had received a batch of chicken eggs early in the spring and the class watched in delight as they soon hatched into fluffy baby chicks. When they hatched, we were all given explicit instructions not to touch or handle the chicks without proper adult supervision. One afternoon before recess, I returned to the classroom alone to retrieve a jacket I had left in my seat. A cheep caught my attention and drew me like a magnet to the small balls of fluff resting in their cage in the corner of the room. Without a thought, I reached in with one small finger to give the smallest chick a reassuring pat. I was positive the chicks were distressed that the whole class had abandoned them for lunch and recess. The moment my finger made contact with feather, I heard the scariest teacher in the second grade bark my name from behind me. I received a lecture that made me cry as well as recess detention that day. No punishment could make me feel as bad as the disappointment in myself for breaking the rules. I did and still feel terrible to this day, and it solidified my desire to please authority figures from then

on. Now as an educator looking back on that experience, I wish that teacher had implemented some SEL strategies in the way that she dealt with my misbehavior. Had she calmly acknowledged that she understood my desire to comfort the chicks and explained why the rule was in place for the safety of the chicks, I assure you I would have never repeated the behavior again. Perhaps for a more spirited troublemaker, her harsh approach would have been exactly what was needed to deliver her message. Acknowledging the differences between students and what they need to be successful is the definition of conscious discipline. Each child is unique and requires a different approach from the education system. Not only does conscious discipline reinforce positive behavior and order in the classroom, but it makes every child feel heard and understood by their teachers. Any educator will tell you that if you invest in your students, you will see return in the classroom. However, as a preservice educator, I imagine the most rewarding measure of success is a feeling that I contributed in some small part to my student's growth and success in their adult lives. Though academic support is a positive advocate for SEL programs in schools, what I found to be the most impactful effect was the personal growth demonstrated by students. Amelia and educators like her are shaping students' lives in more ways than they know. I hope that as the direction of the field of art education continues to shift, the successful development of our students remains the focus.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: IRB CONSENT FORM



OFFICE OF RESEARCH SUPPORT & COMPLIANCE

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

*P.O. Box 7426, Austin, Texas 78713 · Mail Code A3200
(512) 471-8871 · FAX (512) 471-8873*

FWA # 00002030

Date: 10/02/2018
PI: Christina Bain
Dept: Art/Art History
Title: Social and emotional learning through creative classrooms

Re: IRB Exempt Determination for Protocol Number 2018-08-0059

Dear Christina Bain,

Recognition of Exempt status based on 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

Qualifying Period: 10/02/2018 to 10/01/2021. Expires 12 a.m. [midnight] of this date. A continuing review report must be submitted in three years if the research is ongoing.

Responsibilities of the Principal Investigator:

Research that is determined to be Exempt from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review is not exempt from ensuring protection of human subjects. The Principal Investigator (PI) is responsible for the following throughout the conduct of the research study:

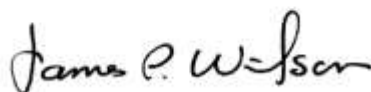
1. Assuring that all investigators and co-principal investigators are trained in the ethical principles, relevant federal regulations, and institutional policies governing human subject research.
2. Disclosing to the subjects that the activities involve research and that participation is voluntary during the informed consent process.
3. Providing subjects with pertinent information (e.g., risks and benefits, contact information for investigators and RSC) and ensuring that human subjects will voluntarily consent to participate in the research when appropriate (e.g., surveys, interviews).
4. Assuring the subjects will be selected equitably, so that the risks and benefits of the research are justly distributed.
5. Assuring that the IRB will be immediately informed of any information or unanticipated problems that may increase the risk to the subjects and cause the category of review to be reclassified to expedited or full board review.
6. Assuring that the IRB will be immediately informed of any complaints from subjects regarding their risks and benefits.
7. Assuring that the privacy of the subjects and the confidentiality of the research data will be maintained appropriately to ensure minimal risks to subjects.
8. Reporting, by submission of an amendment request, any changes in the research study that alter the level of risk to subjects.

These criteria are specified in the PI Assurance Statement that must be signed before determination of exempt status will be granted. The PI's signature acknowledges that they understand and accept these conditions. Refer to the Office of Research Support & Compliance (RSC) website www.utexas.edu/irb for specific information on training, voluntary informed consent, privacy, and how to notify the IRB of unanticipated problems.

1. Closure: Upon completion of the research study, a Closure Report must be submitted to the RSC.
2. Unanticipated Problems: Any unanticipated problems or complaints must be reported to the IRB/RSC immediately. Further information concerning unanticipated problems can be found in the IRB Policies and Procedure Manual.
3. Continuing Review: A Continuing Review Report must be submitted if the study will continue beyond the three year qualifying period.
4. Amendments: Modifications that affect the exempt category or the criteria for exempt determination must be submitted as an amendment. Investigators are strongly encouraged to contact the IRB Program Coordinator(s) to describe any changes prior to submitting an amendment. The IRB Program Coordinator(s) can help investigators determine if a formal amendment is necessary or if the modification does not require a formal amendment process.

If you have any questions contact the RSC by phone at (512) 471-8871 or via e-mail at orssc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

Sincerely,



James Wilson, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Proposed Research Questions
Master's Degree Thesis Study
Social and emotional learning through creative classrooms
Katheryn E. Woodard

Question 1:

What are some areas where Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is directly incorporated into your classroom art curriculum?

Question 2:

What are some ways in which SEL is incorporated informally through instructor-student interaction as well as student-peer interaction?

Question 3:

Do you feel as though formal SEL or informal SEL has a greater impact on the development of Social and Emotional competencies in your students?

Question 3i.

If so, what are some competencies that you have seen develop in your students that you might attribute to SEL as opposed to natural cognitive development?

Question 3ii.

Do you feel like these competencies will have an effect on your students social and emotional functioning as they enter adolescence and adulthood?

Question 4:

Do you feel that SEL is implemented in any unique ways in an art classroom as opposed to standard academic learning?

Question 4i.

If so, do you see any areas in which art education could better implement SEL on a larger scale in other schools or districts?

Question 4ii.

Do you feel that the Austin ISD system would benefit from a standardized SEL art curriculum?

Question 4ii. a.

If so, what are a few things that you would include in that curriculum?

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